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House of Representatives

Implementing the Global Food and Security Act

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey... Mr. Speaker, yesterday I held a hearing to assess the impact of the Global Food Security Act and judge how it is being implemented. We examined it with an eye toward reauthorization later this Congress.

By way of background, as many of you know, the Global Food Security Act was a standout piece of bipartisan legislation that was passed in the last Congress. I was the author of the House version of the bill, which had the support of Ms. BASS and Mr. MEADOWS from our subcommittee.

While GFSA was only signed into law in 2016, it codified a policy that had a far longer history. Like the landmark PEPFAR program, it also bridges multiple administrations.

By way of history, it was President Bush, who beginning in 2002, started to elevate the importance of food security in U.S. foreign policy, especially in Africa, via the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA), which was funded through development assistance and implemented through USAID. At the same time, the Millennium Challenge Corporation began making substantial investments in agriculture-led economic growth programs, particularly in Africa.

It was from this foundation that President Obama instituted the Feed the Future Initiative, launched at the G8 Meeting in L'Aquila, Italy, in 2009. By that time, food insecurity as a national security issue had

come to the fore. The years 2007 through 2008 saw a rise in food prices across the world, and the ensuing political turmoil this caused led to the rise, for example, of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Today, we see President Trump and his administration continuing to implement the GFSA. We are also at a point where we can begin to assess the success of implementation, underscoring an important point for us legislators; it is never sufficient simply to pass legislation, but Congress has a constitutionally-mandated duty to make sure that the executive branch faithfully executes the laws that it passes.

Among the things we heard about are results from our efforts. Have we been successful, for example, in reducing stunting, one of the key purposes of the Act and an outcome that is measureable?

We also heard about the country selection process. How are countries that we decide to partner with chosen? What criteria do we use, and is the criteria measurable and objective?

Also, how faithfully is the GFSA's mandate to work with small-holder farmers being implemented?

As we look toward reauthorization, we need to ask ourselves what is working, what isn't working, and what can we do better to maximize the effect of our investment.

Consider, for example, our nutrition programs aimed at mothers and children during the first 1,000 days of life window, from conception to the second birthday. We know that this period is absolutely critical for achieving healthy outcomes in children that stays with them throughout their lives, helping boost their natural immunities to ward off diseases and giving them a head start in life. We hope to hear from USAID on the successes of our nutrition interventions during the first 1,000 days.

But we need to ask ourselves, are we truly firing on all cylinders? Are we achieving the best possible results in terms of nutrition and stunting reduction, or are we failing to maximize our investments.

USAID, for example, has a neglected tropical diseases program that addresses intestinal worms and parasites that affect close to one billion people. If this work, however, is siloed—if worms are not addressed concomitantly with our nutrition interventions—the question arises: Are we maximizing our nutrition interventions? In other words, are we feeding the future, or simply feeding the worms?

It is relatively inexpensive to conduct

deworming interventions among affected populations. The gains, however, can be enormous. One recent study on cost-effectiveness concluded that “deworming’s effect is robustly positive, with a weight gain per dollar spent more than 35 times greater” than those found in simple school feeding programs.

Thus, we need to ask whether we are taking advantage of synergies in our nutrition efforts, by not only including deworming, but also following up with behavior changing WaSH, or water and sanitation/health instruction. Sometimes the solution of how to keep reinfestation by worms from happening can be as simple as providing children with a pair of shoes, as worms often enter the body through a foot that comes into contact with infected soil, or making sure vegetables are washed thoroughly and peeled.

The question for USAID is whether we are fully utilizing such synergies. Tomorrow, the question for us here in Congress will be what we can do in our reauthorization legislation to ensure that USAID is given the necessary direction and tools to prioritize such synergies.
